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SENIOR CAPSTONE 491-03
Religious & Spiritual Development
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Chris J. Boyatzis, Ph.D., Dept. of Psychology, Bucknell University
boyatzis@bucknell.edu

Course Description:

Our basic task in this interdisciplinary senior capstone is to gain deeper understanding of an important but neglected dimension of human experience: religious and spiritual development. We will consider religious and spiritual development across the lifespan, but our focus will be on childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood, an age span accessible and comprehensible for you. I am a psychologist, so my angle is through a psychological lens. But I will strive for a balance of perspectives that befits a capstone, so sometimes the class might feel like a philosophy or religion course, or a neuropsychology or anthropology course. Studying this topic is complicated and at times sensitive, but to aid our task we will embrace different epistemologies (or ways of knowing). I concur with William James, a founding figure of American psychology and the psychology of religion, who asserted in his 1902 classic, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (which we will read), that “the total expression of human experience . . . invincibly urges me beyond the narrow ‘scientific’ bounds.” James urged us to use information about religious and spiritual experience that comes not just from systematic research but from more descriptive, subjective approaches, ones that let people “speak for themselves.” Many of our readings offer the voices of people, young and old, speaking for themselves about their own spiritual journey.

This seminar is built around serious books that require serious reading; the books—if they are engaged with the intellectual diligence they warrant—will challenge and refine our thinking about the topic and about ourselves. I hope we come to think of ourselves as *spiritual pilgrims* who begin to ask, at surprisingly early ages in childhood, the “ultimate” questions asked by philosophers, theologians, and laypeople for millennia: “What am I living my life for? Where do we come from? What happens to us when we die? Is there a God? Do we have a soul? Why is there *something* rather than nothing? Is there a ‘right’ way of knowing—say, reason and science, or religion and faith? What gives life *meaning*?” One of my goals in this course is to push you to address these questions in a more intentional and thoughtful way than what you have done up to now.

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Religion is an orchestration at a high level of these existential and spiritual concerns, and perhaps religion has persisted through the ages because it offers answers that have a particular narrative coherence and moral meaning to these eternal spiritual questions. Though we won't answer these questions in any "true" or objective sense—as if such finality of truth is ever possible—my goal is to help you progress in your *own* search for your own answers. As we commence this journey, let's consider the advice of the writer Maria Rilke (in *Letters to a Young Poet*): "Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and to try to *love the questions themselves* . . . Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given you because you would not be able to live them . . . Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer." Wise words, especially for the impatient.

On our journey, I will try to cultivate in us an intellectual humility. Let us consider two ideas unrelated at first glance but actually speaking to some related, fundamental truths: One, the electromagnetic spectrum, which consists of a wide band of different energy waves—ultraviolet, microwave, gamma, radio, x-rays, etc.—in which there is only a *thin sliver* of light waves that are actually visible to humans. Two, Hamlet's response to his friend Horatio, who refused to believe Hamlet's claims that he had seen his dead father's ghost: "There are more things on heaven and earth, dear Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy." In short, *whatever we see and perceive is always just a portion of what is really there*. So while we study this (or any) topic, our knowledge and ways of thinking will always limit our understanding. William James noted this when he warned, "The world is richer in realities than conventional science is willing to recognize." And what did St. Exupery, the author of *The Little Prince*, say—the most essential things are those invisible to the eye? So let's keep all these important caveats in mind and recognize our own limitations throughout this course. Doing so may help us want to understand views different from our own.

Course Format and Our Roles:

The class meetings will be a mix of discussion, lecture, student presentations, guest speakers, and collaborative work. I hope to provide a structure to enhance students' learning, to engage you with meaningful and active assignments, and to guide discussion in a helpful way. I want to avoid the impression that I have the "final word" on our course issues. To the contrary, I wrestle daily with these religious and spiritual issues myself. Consequently, I see *all* of us as learners, students and teacher alike, each of us contemplating the issues and contributing to others' grasp of them. And the topic is complex, abstract, at times paradoxical, and personally sensitive. Make no mistake—you will have to sort out and interpret the issues for yourselves. I recall here of the words of Hippolyta, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*: "It must be *your* imagination then, and not theirs." Whatever ideas and conclusions I offer, ultimately it will be

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your interpretation—your “imagination”—that determines the meaning and value of what we study. In short, what matters most in this course are not my actions as a teacher but your actions and growth as a learner.

Expect a substantial amount of challenging reading and writing. Don't skimp on the work; you'll shortchange yourself. **I cannot stress enough how important it is for you to come to class prepared to intelligently discuss the day's readings.** For each reading, avoid the passive tactic of high-lighting and instead be an active learner: Take notes on the major ideas and arguments, record specific details or examples to support and illustrate the ideas, indicate how the ideas relate to or refine or challenge your knowledge from other courses or life experience, and record your own questions and criticisms of the ideas as if you were having a dialogue with the author. The more you use active strategies, the more you will learn for the short- and long-term and the better a class citizen you will be. Your activity as a learner will be also fostered by giving presentations on the readings. Of all the courses I teach, this one seems to have the most genuine and lasting impact on students' personal and life-long development. Toward the end of personal growth, I will be more than happy to talk with you—in my office, in my home, at lunch, in the gym—to discuss the challenging questions and issues this course will generate.

Course Objectives:

The university catalog describes Capstone goals and states that intellectual maturity involves “becoming prepared to make committed choices as participants in our complex world” (Catalog, p. 18). The catalog (p. 19) also states that the Capstone “offers a unique opportunity . . . for realizing . . . [part of] Bucknell's Mission Statement that ‘its students become both productive citizens and intellectually mature, self-aware individuals.’” Specific goals for Capstone include: providing opportunities for students to synthesize and integrate knowledge within and across disciplines, reflect on and evaluate their entire educational experience, make connections between the course and real-world problems and questions that will continue to engage them after they leave Bucknell, and interact with students who have different perspectives. I don't know how well we'll achieve all the goals; no one Capstone can achieve them all, so here are my priorities. I want students to . . .

- ♦ become more “self-aware” in terms of how your religiosity, spirituality, and faith are integrated (or not), to think about how these dimensions of your life are integrated (or not) into your daily behavior and lives, and to think about how these dimensions have developed and changed as you've gotten older.
- ♦ reflect on how your education is related to your religious and spiritual development.

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- ♦ be exposed to and learn from students whose viewpoints differ from your own.
- ♦ develop critical thinking skills—comprehension of complex ideas, evaluation of the ideas, application of the ideas, and integration and synthesis of the ideas.
- ♦ grow intellectually and personally through serious effort in writing, oral presentation, and collaborative work.
- ♦ contemplate issues and questions that will continue to engage you for years to come.

Required books:

Coles, R. (1990). *The spiritual life of children*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
 Fowler, J. (1980). *Stages of faith*. New York: HarperSanFrancisco.
 Freud, S. (1928/1961). *The future of an illusion*. New York: Norton.
 James, W. (1882/1902). *The varieties of religious experience*. New York: Penguin.
 Sweeney, J. (Ed.) (2001). *God within: Our spiritual future—as told by today’s new adults*. Woodstock, VT: Skylight Paths.

I might occasionally assign additional chapters or articles (e.g., chapters by, among others, William James on “The will to believe” and by A.-M. Rizzuto on contemporary psychoanalytic views on God concepts).

Requirements, Assignments, & Grading:

A syllabus is a crucial field guide to the course but it’s not a straight-jacket. This is an “organic” course, “alive” with the potential to change based on the judgment of the instructor and students.

1. **Attendance and Participation** (30% of course grade). As a weekly seminar, your attendance and active participation is crucial. Attendance will affect your grade for this 25% portion. To be specific, I will lower a student’s grade one level on this portion (e.g., A to A-, B+ to B) for each absence (thus, 2 absences equal a change from, say, A- to B on this 25% portion). I expect active participation every class—it reflects your commitment to the course and understanding of ideas, and it contributes to your own and others’ learning. Given the personal and often sensitive nature of our topic, class discussions work best if we keep an open mind and accept and consider respectfully others’ views, however different they may be from our own. I for one will surely try to avoid anything resembling either “Bible thumping” or “Bible bashing.” Aside from participation in regular class discussion, there are other, more structured forms of participation that I describe

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now. *Preparation, performance, and effort in these will contribute to your A&P grade.*

The success of this seminar is up to you. I cannot stress enough how important it is for you to **come to class prepared to intelligently discuss the day's readings**. You are seniors, in a capstone—demonstrate that you deserve to be here. While reading our challenging books, avoid the passive tactic of highlighting and instead be an active learner: Take notes on the major ideas and arguments, record specific details or examples to support and illustrate the ideas, indicate how the ideas relate to or refine or challenge your knowledge from other courses or life experience, challenge the author with your own questions and criticisms of the ideas. The more you use active strategies, the more you will learn and the better a class member you will be. In many classes, students will give presentations on the readings.

Forms of Participation:

Weekly Scribe. Long seminar classes can produce very little in the form of a written record of notes. For most students, a 50-minute lecture yields many more notes than a 3-hour seminar. This is unfortunate to some degree, because the physical act of articulating and writing down ideas during a seminar discussion promote remembering and learning. To promote active note-taking, in each class two students will be chosen on a rotating basis as a recorder or scribe of the class. Each student will be the weekly scribe about twice this semester. Each scribe must submit an email attachment to me with a set of official notes (like class “minutes”) by Friday noon of that week. Soon thereafter I will distribute them to the class via email. At the least, we will end up with an impressive and thorough record of what transpired in each class. At the start of each class we will review the scribe notes (like approving the minutes of a meeting). Why *two* scribes each class? Because people hear and listen and think differently; two accounts will surely be fuller than one (it's a “blind men and the elephant” thing). Also, it will be interesting to see different students' interpretations of the same class.

To present scribe notes, use conventional organization and formatting (headings and subheadings, boldface or italics, etc.). Use proper language though sentence fragments are fine, and capture what you think is important. Our discussions will generate *ideas* more than technical facts (which might predominate in a 200-level lecture), so scribes won't be busily writing all class. Also, the scribing is an “objective” exercise, not the place for offering any criticisms of classmates' and teacher's comments (but please raise them in class discussions, and you can always offer those more personal comments in your journal or exit essays). To the extent you're comfortable with, infuse notes with some “personality” or wit.

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Student facilitations. On many classes we will have student “facilitators” who will make presentations on readings and lead discussion on them. Facilitators must meet with Boyatzis at least 2 days prior to the facilitation to discuss the reading and the student’s plan for the class discussion. Facilitations vary widely in length, from 25 to 45 minutes or more. For students not facilitating, you are expected to share ideas and ask questions.

Collaborative discussions. Sometimes students will team up with others to discuss readings. This small-group learning structure will allow students to air their views and receive feedback more than could occur in whole-class discussion. At times I might ask groups for a written product from their discussion.

Exit essays. In the closing minutes of class I might ask you to write a brief statement that summarizes *your* views of that day’s class. Offer a summary of the major idea(s) you took from the class, raise questions, and/or share any objections or personal reactions. These essays are valuable consolidating your thinking and they give me a sense of students’ learning and growth. Also, exit essays will help me see topics we should revisit or clarify in the next class.

2. **Journal** (30%). This weekly assignment will foster engagement with readings. Keep a computer file for a journal in which you’ll react to readings. Base entries around particular ideas, quotes, and passages. Early in the entry make clear the source (e.g., book & chapter, author, page number). Choose material you take to be the “main point” of the reading, or material you found most interesting or provocative or objectionable. (Don’t avoid this last category: Growth often comes from considering ideas that are offensive or peculiar.) Then offer your response. Address how the idea relates to others you’ve read (in that book or others), include questions you’d like to ask the author or our class, and state any counterarguments.

Entries should have both intellectual/objective and personalized/subjective content. *Strive for this balance*; avoid writing too much self-centered “me-and-my-belly-button” personal narratives and avoid offering only “detached” intellectualism. For some classes, I will distribute questions to address in your journal. The journal is a rich outlet for your thinking as well as fodder for class discussion. Students will be randomly chosen to read their weekly entry to class. Journals will be collected at least biweekly. Assigning a “length” for entries is awkward; write enough to reflect an earnest and mature and careful thoughtfulness about the readings and ideas therein. Realize that depth and intelligence are more likely to occur when you write *more*, not less. The ideas we will consider do not lend themselves to brief contemplation. Effort will be rewarded.

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3. **Psychoanalytic Perspectives Paper** (15%). You will write an 8-page paper on psychoanalytic accounts of religious development—Freud's *Future of an Illusion*, and Ana-Maria Rizzuto's chapter "Religious development: A psychoanalytic point of view." You'll receive a detailed handout on this paper later in the course.

4. **Final Paper** (25%). You will write an essay on your own religious and spiritual development in your first two decades of life. However, this is not solely a first-person narrative but an intellectual quest, as you must integrate and synthesize what we have studied this semester. Details to come.

All journal and papers must be typed, double-spaced (TIMES 12-pt.), with 1-inch margins on all sides. In the *upper right corner* of the first page, type your name, class (e.g., Relig & Spir CAPS), date, and the name of the assignment. Use a staple in the upper left corner. No cover pages or paper clips. *Ignore these specs and have your grade lowered.* As a writer, your major responsibility is to communicate clearly. Therefore, assignments will be marked down for errors (typos, spelling, organization, etc.) because they impede expression of ideas.

Class Schedule

This is the schedule for the next couple of classes. A complete class schedule will be distributed at the next class.

1. August 28 Introductions to each other and the course
 Articulating our issues, defining our terms
 A religious and spiritual development exercise

2. Sept. 4 Are children spiritual? When does the spiritual pilgrimage begin?
 [*Journals due] Robert Coles, *The Spiritual Life of Children*

Introduction,
Ch. 1 ("Psychoanalysis & Religion")
Ch. 2 ("Method"), Ch. 3 ("The face of God")
Ch. 4 ("The voice of God")

Facilitator (Ch. 3): _____ (Ch. 4): _____

Scribes: _____ & _____

3. Sept. 11 Coles's *The Spiritual Life of Children*

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Ch. 9 ("Christian salvation")
Ch. 10 ("Islamic surrender")
Ch. 11 ("Jewish righteousness")

Facilitator (Ch. 10): _____ (Ch. 11): _____

Scribes : _____ & _____

4. Sept. 18 James Fowler's *Stages of faith*
[*Journals due] What is faith? Childhood faith
Collaborative discussions

Fowler: Intro, Chaps 1-3, 7-9, 15-17; Interview procedure (App A, 307-312)

Facilitators (ch 15-17): _____

Scribes: _____ & _____

5. Sept. 25 *Stages of Faith* in adolescence, early adulthood, middle
adulthood Collaborative discussions

Fowler: Chaps 10-11, 18-20

Facilitators (ch 18-19): _____ & _____

Scribes _____ & _____

6. Oct. 2 *God Within*
[*Journals due] Be prepared to share the 1-2 cases you most/least identify
with personally, but also using Fowler's ideas/stages as a
theoretical lens to enrich your discussion

Scribes: _____ & _____

6. Oct. 9 Viewing and analysis of French feature film: *Ponette*
This is the story of a 4-year-old girl whose mother dies in a car accident, leaving
Ponette yearning for reunion with her mother and struggling to understand her
mother's death.

Scribes: _____ & _____

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7. Oct. 16 University
[*Journals due] in
Guest speaker: Prof. Cindy Dell Clark, Penn State
Author of *Flights of Fancy, Leaps of Faith: Children's Myths in Contemporary America*
Readings from Clark TBA
Scribes: _____ & _____

8. Oct. 23 Why do we have religion and God? The classic psychoanalytic view
[*Journals due] Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*
Reading: All of *FoI*; see handout on Freud's book
Scribes: _____ & _____

9. Oct. 30 Freud continued, & a contemporary psychoanalytic view on theogenesis:
Ana-Maria Rizzuto, "Religious development: A psychoanalytic point of view"
Facilitators: _____ & _____
Scribes: _____ & _____

1, 3 p.m. ** Psychoanalytic theory paper due to my office/sec'y, Friday, Nov

10. Nov. 6 William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*
Introduction and Preface
Lectures I – VII:
Religion and neurology, Circumscription of the topic, The reality of the unseen, The religion of healthy-mindedness, The sick soul
Facilitators: _____ & _____
Scribes: _____ & _____

11. Nov. 13 William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*
[*Journals due]

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Lectures IX – X, and XVI - XVII
Conversion, Conversion (concluded),
Mysticism

Facilitators: _____
Scribes: _____ & _____

12. Nov. 20 William James, *Varieties of Religious Experience* concluded

Postscript Lectures XVIII - Postscript
Philosophy, Other characteristics, Conclusions,

Facilitators: _____
Scribes: _____ & _____

13. Nov. 27 *No class; what are you thankful for?*

14. Dec. 4 Last class: Brief presentations of final paper ideas
[*Journals due] Lessons learned, questions unanswered

Final Paper due: Dec. _____

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